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ABSTRACT

The Scale of Primary Classroom Practices (SPCP) is a short instrument which enables primary school teachers to observe and assess what goes on in their classrooms. The SPCP is divided into sections that describe teachers' and students' activities. A study of the SPCP has provided support for the reliability and construct validity of the scale. Teachers can use the SPCP to: (1) determine how developmentally appropriate their classroom practices are; (2) identify which developmentally appropriate practices are not found in their classrooms; (3) foster cooperative learning experiences in their classrooms; and (4) select practices to implement in their classrooms. A copy of the SPCP is appended. (BC)

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THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF A SCALE TO ASSESS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRIMARY CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF A SCALE TO ASSESS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRIMARY CLASSROOM PRACTICES

In a number of regions of the country, large numbers of children are being assessed as "not ready" for entrance into local primary education programs. In Georgia, for instance, more than 7,000 youngsters were recently found to be "not ready".[1] At the same time, a disturbing trend has been observed among elementary schools concerning a downward extension of a curriculum traditionally reserved for older children into the early primary grades.[2] These situations and the increased cost of providing "transitional" programs for the growing numbers of "not ready" children have led to serious concerns about the problem of matching primary education programs and children's abilities.

Many states and school districts have tried to deal with this problem by experimenting with a variety of solutions. For example, a majority of states have changed the birthdate requirement for kindergarten entrance so that all children entering such programs must be a least five years of age. In addition, many school districts have instituted stringent screening criteria with the purpose of prohibiting children "not ready" from entering kindergarten. Some districts have developed prekindergartens, junior first grades, transitional rooms or other approaches to provide for the educational needs of children assessed as "not ready". And it appears that more and more school districts are expecting young children to meet specific exit requirements before moving on to the next grade.

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[1] Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, ASCD Update. Alexandria, VA, Volume 30, Number 5 (1988).

[2] Fernie, David E., *Becoming a Student: Messages from First Settings.* Theory Into Practice 27 (1) 3-10, Winter (1988).

While the verdict regarding the effectiveness of these efforts is presently unknown, they have clearly aroused a great deal of controversy among educators and parents alike. A controversy has arisen because the implemented solutions attempt to change the child to fit the school's expectations of them. Many early childhood experts have disagreed with such solutions, indicating that other approaches need to be developed which change the kind of education a child receives so that it better fits the child's needs. It is this latter approach that has been described under the concept of "developmentally appropriate practice" (DAP) for primary classrooms.[1]

DAP consists of education practices which reflect what is currently known about how children learn and what they are capable of learning. They include practices which respect the developmental level of the age group of children being served while, at the same time, making provisions for the developmental differences which exist between children. These practices are based on the principles of universal sequences of growth and change which occur in children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive domains, combined with the recognition of a child's individual pattern of growth, strengths, interests and background.

Such a concept is quite different from the common idea that all children, no matter what their age, learn the same way. It is also clearly at variance with the idea that all children must learn the same thing within a classroom and that children must always fit the school's expectations for them. Primary grade classrooms would certainly be different if their practices were changed to fit

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[1] Bredekamp, Sue (ed.), Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Education Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8: Expanded Edition. NAEYC, Washington, D.C. (1987).

children's developmental needs rather than vice versa. This latter idea is the goal of DAP.

Many national educational organizations including the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the International Reading Association (IRA), the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) have supported the idea of schools designed to meet the developmental needs of children. However, it was the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) that cast such a concept in clearer perspective. They did this by adopting a position statement in 1987 that lists and describes practices identified as appropriate or inappropriate for the primary grades.[1]

To operationalize, for primary classroom use, NAEYC's position on developmentally appropriate practices, the authors developed a rating scale designed to help teachers evaluate the extent to which their classrooms reflect DAP as outlined by NAEYC.

The Scale of Primary Classroom Practices

The purpose of our Scale of Primary Classroom Practices, is to provide primary classroom teachers with a short instrument that they can use to look at what goes on in their classroom. The scale is divided into two sections, one that describes what teachers do and one that lists things children might do. Under each heading (What Teachers Do and What Children Do) is a list of dichotomous statements. For each pair of statements
the teacher is asked to decide which statement most closely reflects what goes on in their classroom. After selecting a statement the user must then decide whether the statement selected is "sort of true" or "really true" for their situation.

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[1] ibid.

After completing the scale, the teacher can then begin to consider changes that can be made in an effort to become more developmentally appropriate (see Implications for Teachers, below).

While still in the development stage; an initial study was conducted which provided support for the reliability and construct validity for the Scale of Primary Classroom Practices.[1] On the basis of the characteristics and preliminary research findings associated with the scale, recommendations can be made for teachers who are interested using the Scale of Primary Classroom Practices.

Implications for Teachers

Primary grade teachers, working with children aged five through eight, who are interested in evaluating the developmental appropriateness of what takes place in their classrooms will find the Scale of Primary Classroom Practices useful. For example, use of the scale to evaluate classroom practices can provide teachers with the opportunity to think about the kinds of things they and their students do. In the scale, teachers are asked to evaluate such practices as time spent in planning, how subjects are taught and how children ;are encouraged to do their best. Teachers are also asked to evaluate how children in their classrooms spend their time. As a result of completing the scale, therefore, primary grade teachers can obtain a sense of how developmentally appropriate their classroom practices are.

More specifically, since the scale consists of a set of 36 dichotomous statements organized into pairs, representing appropriate and inappropriate classroom practices, teachers can easily identify what developmentally appropriate practices are not commonly found within their classroom. This information can be used to help them in altering their current teaching practices

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[1] Burt, L., et.al., *The Scale of Primary Classroom Practices*. 1989 (in press).

to become more developmentally appropriate and, in doing so, reduce inappropriate practices. For example, teachers who find that it is "really true" that most of their planning time is used to prepare worksheets and other desk work can think of ways to allow more time for preparing the environment so children can learn through active involvement. The more time spent on planning for active involvement in the learning process, the less time there will be for preparing worksheets and other desk work. Likewise, when children are more actively involved in learning, the less worksheets and desk work teachers need to correct.

In addition, teachers who find that their students are rarely permitted to converse and help each other during work time can develop experiences which encourage children to converse and help each other while at work or play. This may mean changing the seating arrangement so that children can sit in small clusters or groups. Cooperative learning experiences can be adopted with noisier environments understood and tolerated.

Furthermore, teachers can select certain practices for gradual implementation over a period of time. After using the scale, teachers may decide that to become more developmentally appropriate it would be worthwhile to try to incorporate more observation and recording of children's work as a method of assessment, decreasing their dependence on regular subject matter testing. As more and more observations and recordings are carried out, the less necessary it will be to rely on frequent formal testing procedures. Over a period of time, teachers will become more adept and efficient in their observations and recordings, making them a regular part of their classroom practices. With the aid of the Scale of Primary Classroom Practices, therefore, teachers can identify appropriate classroom practices they can adopt

or increase. In doing so, they will automatically eliminate or decrease less appropriate practices in their classroom.

Finally, teacher pairs can also use the scale. In our initial study, it became quite clear that it doesn't take long or require extensive training for an outside observer to use the scale in gathering sufficient information about the practices of a classroom. As a result, teacher colleagues can spend as little as 30 minutes studying the scale's contents, and about three hours of classroom observation to complete the scale with useful results. When classroom observations like these are done in pairs, teachers can together share their ratings of each other's practices, and then help each other improve their teaching practices. This collegial model can be extremely beneficial to primary teachers who are building a team approach to implementing developmentally appropriate classroom practices or who would like to establish a small cadre of like minded professionals within their school building. Whether used alone or with a colleague, the Scale of Primary Classroom Practices can be a useful tool for teachers interested in providing a more developmentally appropriate classroom environment.

Conclusion

Heightened interest in developmentally appropriate practices as a way of minimizing difficulties for young children in primary grade classrooms, and the outlining of inappropriate and appropriate practices by the National Association for the Education of Young Children set the stage for the authors' development of the Scale of Primary Classroom Practices. A scale designed to be used by primary classroom teachers as they explore ways to make what they do and what the children in their classroom do, more developmentally appropriate. As such, the scale can be useful for teachers in their efforts at designing classroom

conditions that are mindful of the developmental needs of primary grade children.

THE SCALE OF PRIMARY CLASSROOM PRACTICES (SPCP)

David Wright, Linda Burt and Alan Sugawara
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Directions: Below are 22 pairs of statements reflecting what some primary grade teachers do and 14 pairs of statements of what some primary grade children do. You are asked to select the statement that most closely reflects what teachers and children do in this classroom. You are also to check whether the statement is really true or sort of true.

What Teachers Do

Really true	Sort of true				Sort of true	Really true
❑	❑	1. Teacher's planning time is used to prepare the environment so children can learn through active involvement.	OR	Teacher's planning time is used to prepare worksheets and other desk work.	❑	❑
❑	❑	2. Teacher returns children's writing efforts for correction if correct spelling is not used.	OR	Teacher accepts children's writing efforts that include invented spelling.	❑	❑
❑	❑	3. Teacher integrates math activities with other relevant subjects, such as science and social studies.	OR	Teacher teaches math as a separate subject at a scheduled time each day, with no integration with other relevant subjects.	❑	❑
❑	❑	4. Teacher provides a day that is fragmented among many different groups and subjects.	OR	Teacher provides for program continuity by integrating subjects and children.	❑	❑
❑	❑	5. Teacher assists children in making smooth transitions between groups or programs throughout the day by preparing children for the transitions.	OR	Teacher provides a day with little attempt to communicate or coordinate successful transitions.	❑	❑
❑	❑	6. Teacher assesses each child's progress through observation and recording at regular intervals.	OR	Teacher assesses each child's progress by regular testing on each subject.	❑	❑
❑	❑	7. Teacher tries to motivate children to meet her standards of achievement.	OR	Teacher points out to children how good it feels to live up to one's own standards of achievement.	❑	❑
❑	❑	8. Teacher builds on children's internal motivation to make sense of the world and acquire competence.	OR	Teacher attempts to motivate children by giving numerical or letter grades, stickers, gold stars on charts, candy, or privileges such as extra minutes of recess.	❑	❑
❑	❑	9. Teacher is not sensitive to signs of overstimulation in children and treats such demonstrations as misbehavior that must be punished.	OR	Teacher limits or contains over-exposure to stimulation such as exciting, frightening, or disturbing real or fantasy events.	❑	❑
❑	❑	10. Teacher recognizes that every infraction does not warrant attention and identifies those that can be used as learning opportunities.	OR	Teacher maintains control of the classroom by enforcing rules, giving external rewards for good behavior, and punishing infractions.	❑	❑
❑	❑	11. Teacher requires that all children complete the same tasks.	OR	Teacher encourages individual choices of tasks to be completed.	❑	❑

Really true	Sort of true				Sort of true	Really true
❑	❑	12. Teacher allows as much time as needed for children to complete work.	OR	Teacher expects all children to complete work in the same allotted time.	❑	❑
❑	❑	13. Teacher does not have time for private conversations with children.	OR	Teacher ensures moments of private time alone with each child.	❑	❑
❑	❑	14. Teacher provides multicultural and nonsexist activities and materials.	OR	Teacher ignores cultural and individual differences and makes no provision for their exploration.	❑	❑
❑	❑	15. Teacher leaves art, music and physical education to the specialists who meet with the class once a week.	OR	Teacher integrates art, music, movement, woodworking, drama, and dance (and other opportunities for physical activity) into the daily curriculum.	❑	❑
❑	❑	16. Teacher uses the teacher's edition of a textbook, when appropriate, as a guide to structure learning situations and to stimulate ideas about interesting projects.	OR	Teacher moves sequentially through the lessons as outlined in the teacher's edition of the text.	❑	❑
❑	❑	17. Teacher provides discrete time segments and only textbook related activities to develop language, writing, spelling and reading abilities.	OR	Teacher provides generous amounts of time and a variety of interesting, integrated activities for children to develop language, writing, spelling and reading abilities.	❑	❑
❑	❑	18. Teacher treats social studies as social relations where children explore values and learn rules of social living and respect for individual differences through experience.	OR	Teacher provides for social studies by focusing on holidays.	❑	❑
❑	❑	19. Teacher sets limits that are negative.	OR	Teacher sets limits that are positive and understood by the children.	❑	❑
❑	❑	20. Teacher responds to children's questions in a way that extends their ideas.	OR	Teacher responds to children's questions with factual answers.	❑	❑
❑	❑	21. Teacher provides workbook activities for children to develop language, writing, spelling, and reading ability.	OR	Teacher provides a variety of interesting activities for children other than workbooks to develop language, writing, spelling, and reading ability.	❑	❑
❑	❑	22. Teacher assists children in figuring out for themselves how to improve their work.	OR	Teacher tells children how to improve their work.	❑	❑

What Children Do

❑	❑	1. Children can choose to work alone or in small groups.	OR	Children work silently and alone.	❑	❑
❑	❑	2. Work time is spent on worksheets or other assigned desk work.	OR	Work time is spent in learning centers and on projects.	❑	❑
❑	❑	3. Children engage in many daily opportunities to develop social skills such as cooperating, helping, negotiating and solving interpersonal problems.	OR	Children do not have opportunities to practice social skills in the classroom.	❑	❑

Really true	Sort of true				Really true	Sort of true
❑	❑	4. Children work only when sitting in assigned desks that are rarely moved.	OR	Children work at movable tables, on the floor, or other locations.	❑	❑
❑	❑	5. Children participate in daily planned outdoor activities.	OR	Children's outdoor time is limited to recess.	❑	❑
❑	❑	6. Children read about science from a textbook and complete related worksheets.	OR	Children discover science through projects that are experimental and exploratory which provide for active involvement of each of them.	❑	❑
❑	❑	7. Children acquire math skills through spontaneous play, projects, situations of daily living and exploring concrete objects.	OR	Children acquire math skills through use of a textbook with accompanying workbooks, practice sheets, and board work.	❑	❑
❑	❑	8. Children learn social studies concepts through a variety of projects and playful activities over extended periods of time.	OR	Children learn social studies concepts through brief activities that center on a social studies textbook or commercially developed newspaper.	❑	❑
❑	❑	9. Children engage in teacher-directed tasks and interests.	OR	Children engage in projects, learning centers, and playful activities that reflect their current interests.	❑	❑
❑	❑	10. Children provide daily care to plants and animals in the classroom.	OR	Children are not provided with opportunities to care for living things.	❑	❑
❑	❑	11. Children are rarely permitted to converse and help each other during work time.	OR	Children converse and help each other while at work or play.	❑	❑
❑	❑	12. Children play non-competitive, impromptu oral "math stumper" and number games to practice their math skills.	OR	Children play competitive games between children or groups of children to learn math facts.	❑	❑
❑	❑	13. Children engage in math as a separate subject at a scheduled time each day.	OR	Children engage in math activities that are integrated with other relevant projects, such as science and social studies.	❑	❑
❑	❑	14. If needed, children in small groups practice letters, phonics, and word recognition through enjoyable games and activities.	OR	Children, by themselves, routinely practice reading subskills with worksheets.	❑	❑

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